

## **Green Burgers Make People Sick**

By: Lee Singletary

If you are a Philadelphia city dweller, chances are you've seen the City of Philadelphia's Public Health advertisements with the message "If You're Sick, Stay Home" boldly plastered on busses and billboards. Too bad there is no disclaimer detailing that if you're sick and you stay home, you probably won't be getting paid.

Paid sick time off is not an option for 41% of Philadelphian workers. Today, more than 210,000 workers do not get a single paid sick day, and as a result, sickness and disease are being spread amongst coworkers and ill children who are infected by their parents and sent to school.

Research on the H1N1 flu proves that 25% of employees contract the virus as well as potentially fatal diseases from other employees. Given this research, it is no wonder why many Philadelphian workers support a new ordinance called "Promoting Healthy Families and Workplaces," which would make sure employees are entitled to paid sick leave. Many workers feel that they should not be penalized for having to take a day or two off to rest if they are sick.

In a public hearing at Philadelphia's City Hall in Philadelphia on Tuesday, March 1, business owners, bill supporters and governmental representatives gathered to hear both sides of the story when it comes to paid sick time off. Marian B. Tasco of the Public Health and Human Services Committee, Darrell L. Clarke, Fifth Council District Representative, and former Mayor of Philadelphia and current Commerce and Economic Development Chair Wilson Goode, were all in attendance to support the bill. The three representatives made their testimony and were supported by the ubiquitous roars of excitement by all protesters and bill supporters. While Goode and Tasco noted their support to pass the bill based on the individual worker's needs, Clarke represented the plea of a body of those workers. Clarke even reasoned both sides of the fence on this issue, stating "there needs to be a program that works, where workers earn their sick time." The movement and chatter in the room after Clarke's statement suggested that the majority of the room was in favor of this point.

Amongst the excitement however were boos and distressed chants when Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development Alan Greenberger was asked to respond to facts and figures in support of paid sick time off. Greenberger's concerns for passing the bill were centered on the idea that business owners would be monetarily affected (it would cost employers more) when pressed with paying sick workers. "Business owners have to replace a paid worker with another one who is also paid," Greenberger stated. As an individual who primarily focuses on planning and economic development, Greenberger was less concerned about the quality of work for the individual worker and more concerned about the city's competitive job landscape when it comes to the

regional economy. “There are 36 jobs for every 100 people in the city, compared to a 56 jobs for every 100 in the surrounding suburbs,” Greenburg continued.

The city has attributed much success in new job creation and retention. Between the years 2000 and 2009 there was an increase of over 46,400 new jobs. In a response to this figure, Goode said workers in Philadelphia “want quality, not just jobs, but job quality.” Greenberger’s other excuses such as small businesses’ unsophisticated payroll systems and employee health benefit schedules being negatively affected by the new bill were met with more jeers and disdain by protesters.

In a calming response for support of the bill, Marian Tasco lobbied to get Greenberger to see why paying attention to individuals such as working mothers will ultimately lead to job success on a regional level. She stated, “when women thrive, families thrive, and when families thrive, cities thrive.”

In a dispute that was 4-1 if you include Goode, Tasco, Clarke and about 200 bill supporters and protesters, Greenberger (and the handful of small business owners who also opposed the bill) were on the lonely side. Every time Greenberger gave what supporters felt was an unsympathetic response to the facts and insights they offered, the room erupted in crosstalk and of course, more boos. Many people trickled out before the meeting was adjourned – it’s probably because Greenberger’s unsympathetic responses made them sick.



A protesting bill-supporter ignores security personnel after repeated warnings to remain seated or risk being asked to leave.